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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, March 2, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, and the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Listeners, the hour for airing troubles has arrived. In other words, Tuesday has come around again and the perplexities and problems of the week are gathere for answers.

Here is a letter from a young housekeeper who is equipping her kitchen and can't decide between saucepans of enamelware and those of aluminum.

Probably the best way to solve this problem is to line up the advantages and the disadvantages of both kinds of kitchenware, side by side. Then you can make up your mind which suits your purpose best. I might say in advance that both aluminum and enamelware have been kitchen favorites for years and that if you buy a good quality, you probably won't go wrong, whichever you choose.

Let's consider aluminum first. Lots of good things to say about aluminum. It is both durable and light in weight, so comfortable to handle. It is also moderate in cost and good looking. It is a good conductor of heat so spreads heat evenly over the entire surface of the utensil. That saves scorching on the bottom of the pan. And then, though it discolors with alkali, and brightens with acid, it is a perfectly safe cooking material.

However -- and here come the disadvantages -- however, acid foods may be discolored by cooking in aluminum if it is darkened and aluminum in the same condition affects the color of coffee and tea. This may or may not bother you. Sometimes, too, darkened aluminum will discolor white sauce cooked in it. Poor grade aluminum is also liable to pitting which means that the surface may become rough and harder to clean in time. Very lightweight aluminum -- the cheap paper-thin kind -- is not satisfactory for saucepans because it bends easily and soon gets out of shape. Then you have tipsy pans that not only cook food unevenly but are likely to tumble from the stove.

Now let's stack up the advantages and disadvantages of enamelware. One advantage is that enamelware is non-soluble. It will not scratch, peel, rust or discolor. It is moderate in cost and easy to clean if given proper care. It absorbs heat readily, will not discolor with alkalis as aluminum does and will not discolor food. So it is especially useful for double boilers in which custards and white sauce are cooked and for mixing bowls. Like aluminum it is light in weight.

But, enamelware has to be handled and heated with care because it cracks and chips easily. Because it is a poor conductor of heat, hot spots may develop on it and foods are likely to scorch. Once foods have burned in enamelware, it is difficult to clean. Where alkali discolors aluminum, very strong acid affects the glaze of all but the better grades of enamelware. The best grades, by the way are expensive. One more disadvantage of enamelware is that it is not resistant to sudden temperature changes.

Now for the second problem of the week: What causes egg whites to become tough when boiled?

My, my, listeners, how the same egg questions do come up in the spring! Just as sure as the flowers bloom. The eternal answer to that question is: Too much heat or too long cooking causes egg-whites to toughen. The reason the foods people have stressed cooking eggs at low or moderate temperature, below the boiling point, mind you, is that they have learned long since what too much heat will do to an egg white. If you want firm but tender whites, you won't boil your eggs. You'll cook them just under boiling temperature and cook them a little longer.

Here's a query from a lady who has been out buying material for spring clothes. "What is the difference between sizing and weighting in fabrics and why are they used?"

Answer: Generally speaking, these two words "sizing" and "weighting" are sometimes used interchangeably. But the textile people generally use the word "sizing" for the starch or other soluble substances that manufacturers put in cottons or linens or synthetics to give them a better appearance -- more body, so to speak, and also to help them hold their shape on the counter, not crease with handling.

They speak of "weighting", on the other hand, as a substance added to silks to make them feel and look heavier. Generally metallic salts are used for weighting silk.

Before buying a cotton fabric, you'll be wise to rub it between your fingers and see how much sizing comes out. See whether the material feels firm because the yarns are firmly woven or because the spaces between the yarns contain a good deal of filling.

Most silks today contain some weighting. But if fabric is labeled or guaranteed as "pure-dye silk", you can be sure that it is not too heavily weighted. To be sure you aren't buying one that is so heavily weighted that it will soon wear out, you will be wise to look for the label, or inquire from the clerk or buyer about the weighting, or take a sample home and try the burning test on it. If the ash left after the fabric burns holds its shape and shows the weave, it is heavily weighted. When you are looking for a durable but less expensive silk than pure-dye a good synthetic is a better buy than a silk that contains considerable weighting.

Last question. A listener wants to know how to grow gardenias in her home. I am sorry to tell you that our radio garden adviser reports that gardenias are one of the most difficult flowers to keep growing through the blooming stage in the house. Gardenias are a hothouse plant because they require a fairly high temperature and moist atmosphere. The average home or apartment is far too dry for these plants. As for growing them outdoors, this is only rarely successful except from Charleston, South Carolina, southward, including all the Gulf coast region, On the Pacific coast, Los Angeles is about the northern limit for their outdoor culture. Gardenias not only need warmth and humid air but they need acid soil which is loose and fibrous. And they need considerable sunshine.

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